



# ANCIENT GREECE



## ANCIENT GREEK ATHLETICS AND SPORTS

Greek men loved to participate in athletic activities during leisure times. The Greek States encouraged their citizens to take part in sports so that they would keep physically fit. Many local competitions were held in which the athletes could enter. There were four major competitions held such as *"Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian and Nemean Games"* that attracted competitors from all over the Greek world. These games were called the *"Panhellenic Games"*. Each one was held to honour a particular deity.

The Olympic Games were the oldest and most important of the competitions. It is felt that these games developed from the funeral games held in honour of Pelops, a Greek hero. They began in 776 B.C. and were held every four years at Olympia in honour of Zeus. The games lasted for five days.

Messengers travelled through out the land of Greece and its colonies announcing the date of the Games and inviting people to attend. All wars had to stop until the Games were over so that people could travel to Olympia safely.

A group of impressive buildings were built at Olympia to house the various sports. At the site there were sports grounds for the various events, facilities for the spectators and competitors and temples for the religious ceremonies. In the *"Palaestra"* the athletes trained for the jumping and wrestling events. The *"Gymnasium"* was used for running and throwing events. The *"Prytaneion"* contained a sacred fire which was used to light the fires on all the altars at Olympia. The running events took place at the *"Stadium"*. The *"Pelopion"* contained the burial mound of the hero Pelops. The *"Leonidation"* was the hotel for visiting officials. In the *"Bouleuterion"*, the Olympic Council held their meetings. The Temple of Zeus held a statue of the god which was made of ivory and gold and stood over 13 metres (43 feet) tall.

During the Games there were six main events such as running, wrestling, the pentathlon, boxing, chariot races and horse races. Winners were presented with an olive wreath, palm branches and woollen ribbons. All the athletes except for chariot drivers performed naked.